

I am studying “Engineering Business Information Systems - Wirtschaftsinformatik” and spent my exchange in the 5th semester at Ewha Womans University.

I recommend getting the vaccinations checked in advance, for example, the Hepatitis vaccinations need around six months to be completed. Whether to buy both flight tickets in advance should be carefully considered. Ordering the flight back probably saves some money but also limits your choice of how long you want to stay. And maybe you want to visit some other countries after the semester is finished. We did exactly that and had to plan to come back to Seoul to grab our flight back to Germany.

Now moving to the actual study experience. First, for my fellow male students the info that you may apply to Ewha despite the name, which in fact is a University exclusively for women. But they welcome men as exchange students. Second, course choice - I looked at the English-taught courses in the last semester and made my “wishlist”. In the end, the courses offered during Fall 22’ changed slightly and some schedules overlapped. I ended with “Machine Learning”, “Human-Computer Interaction” and “Big Data Security” for computer science. For the business part, I took “Managing Organization Behavior” and “Financial Management”. All five were approved by Mr. Hefter.

Third, the lectures and professors. In general, the lectures are way more one-sided, even if a question is raised it's probably rhetorical or the professor will give the answer immediately. Since attendance is mandatory there will always be a room full of students but if they pay attention is not guaranteed. While I traveled after most covid restrictions got lifted two of my courses were online only and one was hybrid. The online lectures also had a system to check attendance, for example, a short quiz about the lecture. Korea is known to have a very competitive education system, and my experience supports that. It's expected and normal that students invest a lot of hours outside of lectures to study and prepare. Personally, I have to admit that my Korean peers probably spend way more time than I did, but the professors seem to agree that can be excused because ultimately I received very gracious grades. Some other differences to exams at FRA UAS are that there are mid-terms, so around half the semester most courses have some sort of quiz or full exam. It depends on the course if it's graded or not. Unlike in Germany, it is allowed to take several exams on one day, we had to take three finals on one day.

Before the exchange, I had the naive impression that English would be sufficient to get along in Seoul. My determination to learn Korean was limited, so I could only read the hangul alphabet when I arrived. Well, I got along with that i.e. at a restaurant it works perfectly to just point at the menu. But I would strongly recommend learning Korean beforehand. While pretty much everyone understands English they are afraid or embarrassed to speak it. So speaking Korean helps get in touch with the locals.

I do not want to close with the bad things so let's look at them now. The good thing is they are few in number. The first one is also the biggest regret, not speaking Korean.

Next time I definitely would learn that before the trip. The second rather minor inconvenience is the climate in Korea. The high humidity leads to an unpleasantly hot summer and freezing winter. On the other side, there is barely any rain/bad weather.

My expectations and reasons why I choose to go to Korea were to indulge in a very different culture, cuisine, way of life, and people. And I got that and even more, my expectations were surpassed by far. I will remember those four months as a unique and sensational time. I could try a wide variety of great Korean and other Asian dishes. It definitely paid off to take the courage and try the things that look a little bit odd. I made a lot of friends from all over the world. Could enjoy great modern and historic architecture (way more colorful and aesthetic than castles here). Also all the small differences in social interaction and public behavior. It is really stunning to witness the collective society, i.e. it is the norm to be silent on the metro so others can sleep.

Since we were already in the region we took the chance to visit other countries as well. I can strongly recommend that since the flights are very cheap, we went to Vietnam and Thailand. Spending Christmas on "Phú Quốc" and New Year's Eve in "Chiang Mai" was the best ending to an amazing adventure.

Talking about the nice experiences we made let's make a short list of things I would advise other to see. In Seoul directly the nightlife in Itaewon or Hongdae is worth more than one visit. And don't underestimate the areas, there is more than a vibrant nightlife to see. You can also find exquisite fashion there. Especially if you stay around Ewha you should also pay a visit to Sinchon and treat yourself to some nice "dak-galbi" or other dishes. But even if you are not at Ewha you should visit it, because the campus is a true pleasure for your eyesight. Next to Hongdae and Sinchon is the "Yeonnam-dong" area that offers a more modern and exquisite offering of restaurants and cafes. Temples and palaces should be top of your list anyway. My recommendation for that in Seoul is the Changgyeonggung Palace. Whether you miss "Mainufer" or not, you have to hang out with some friends at Han River. Koreans would recommend getting "Chimaek" there, which is an abbreviation for "chicken and beer".

If you are exhausted from studying or partying you have a wide variety of ways to enjoy your free time. You could play video games in a Pc-bang, battle your friends in an arcade, or play a board game in a boardgame-cafe.

Outside of Seoul, I made very memorable trips to Busan and the "Everland" -amusement park, visit Busan in summer if you can to enjoy the Beach.

For myself, this trip definitely changed my perspective of the world, in some way it seems way smaller now. Having spent four months on the other side of the globe far way locations suddenly feel reachable. On the same page entering a completely new environment helped me approach strangers more easily.

In terms of skills and learnings, I would asses that I could get a grasp of the differences between the German economy and the Korean, also how people work in different ways. I would rate the Machine Learning courses above all others, I got a great introduction to the topic and I'm able to

fundamentally work with it. Looking at innovative companies today it is widespread to work with international teams. I think that such experience can help to understand and overcome the possible faultlines that might arise in such constellations.

All in all, I am very happy and thankful to be so lucky to gain such an outstanding experience. I want to encourage everybody that has second thoughts to do it. If I get the chance to do it again I will take it for sure.